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ABSTRACT

The most important historical theory of persuasion is Aristotelian Rhetorical Theory. Aristotle's work, "The Rhetoric," is divided into three books, each of which discuss principles relevant to persuasion. Book One establishes the philosophical position of rhetoric to logic; establishes the purposes of rhetoric; discusses three types of proof: ethos, pathos, and logos; defines rhetoric as a faculty for providing two modes of argumentation: paradeigma and enthymeme; and delineates the types of rhetorical situations. Book Two deals with the audience, viewed by Aristotle as a study of human emotions and attitudes. Book Three is an examination of speech composition in which Aristotle discusses delivery, style, diction, and metaphor. (Seventeen notes are included.) (MS)

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PERSPECTIVES ON RHETORICAL HISTORY:
ARISTOTLE'S RHETORICAL THEORY

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ARISTOTLE'S RHETORICAL THEORY

In the following analysis I will discuss rhetoric and its relationship to persuasion. I will also comment on Aristotelian Theory as described in Aristotle's best-seller, The Rhetoric.

RHETORIC AND PERSUASION

The roots of persuasion go deep in historical soil. Persuasion has been studied in two basic ways. First, by examining artifacts (speeches, documents, treatises) scholars have developed understanding about persuasion. Second, by testing hypothesis from past persuasion theories, scholars have learned about the nature and effects of persuasion. The most important historical theory of persuasion is Aristotelian Rhetorical Theory. Aristotelian Theory has been used many years by speech scholars with few revisions in his original findings.

Aristotle was a great scientist and philosopher during the fourth century B.C. In ancient times, the primary mode of persuasion was public speaking. All the theorizing and discussion at that time dealt with speech as a communication mechanism. "Rhetoric was for Aristotle essentially the same concept as persuasion is for us today."¹ Some scholars today still prefer to use the word "rhetoric" in lieu of "persuasion." Aristotle defined rhetoric as "a faculty of discovering all the possible means of persuasion in any subject."²

ARISTOTELIAN THEORY

During the fourth century B.C. Aristotle produced The Rhetoric. This publication provides numerous contributions to the study of persuasion. Aristotle uses a systematic approach in The Rhetoric. Other rhetoricians of this time period wrote "how to" handbooks describing oratory. Aristotle preferred a methodological study into the phenomena of rhetoric. "Crem notes that Aristotle's treatise is unique, in that it is a properly scientific consideration of the subject."³

The Rhetoric is divided into three books which describe the stages of preparing a public address. I will discuss some of the principles relevant to persuasion.

Book One

Book One of The Rhetoric establishes the philosophical position of rhetoric to logic. "Rhetoric is the counterpart of dialectic."⁴ Rhetoric deals with moral matters while dialectic deals with speculative considerations. Rhetoric adjusts to the common citizen, while dialectic reaches only a selected audience of logically trained minds. Rhetoric uses syllogisms and enthymemes, while dialecticians use induction.

Book One establishes four purposes of rhetoric. First, if a person who is true and just falls prey to his opposition, a rhetorician (through the use of effective discourse) can straighten out the imbalance. Second, since science deals with matters which are hard for the masses to comprehend, rhetoric steps in to facilitate learning (through the use of generally

accepted principles). Third, by attempting to prove true statements the rhetorician can counteract false arguments. Fourth, rhetoric functions as a form of self defense. "It would be absurd if it were considered disgraceful not to be able to defend oneself with the help of the body, but not disgraceful as far as speech is concerned, whose use is more characteristic of man than that of the body."⁵

As mentioned earlier, Aristotle described rhetoric as the discovering of all the means of persuasion. This is the function of rhetoric. Persuasion is achieved through the use of proofs. Proofs are either artistic or inartistic. Artistic proofs are arguments from probability. An artistic proof stems from a speaker's ability to discover lines of argument from a pool of accepted opinions. Inartistic proofs are direct evidence. Inartistic proofs include testimony, contracts, and witnesses. Both artistic and inartistic proofs are members of the Aristotelian invention process because both must be molded into actual discourse.

Aristotle discusses three types of proof: ethos, pathos, and logos. Ethos is a person's perceived moral character or credibility. Pathos is the arousal of emotion that lies in the listener. Logos is a logical, rhetorical argument within the structure of the speech.

Aristotle defines rhetoric as a faculty for providing two modes of argumentation. The first mode is titled, paradeigma. This is an inductive argument that supplies probable conclusions

to the subjects discussed. The second mode is titled, enthymeme. This is a deductive rhetorical syllogism.

The enthymeme takes its materials from the topoi. Topoi is the seat or place of an argument. According to Brake they are "areas or locales in which ideas are grouped according to their kinds and from which they can be drawn."⁶ Topoi are of two types. The first is titled, kinei and is concerned with general principles of probability that apply equally (are common) to all disciplines. The second type, eide is employed when topoi of a common nature fail to apply to the argumentation. Brake stated that "the special topoi embrace substantive items or propositions found largely in the areas of ethics and politics and furnish the premises for enthymemes."⁷ Aristotle felt that people rely more on specific than common topoi.

Aristotle delineates the types of rhetorical situations. The first type is deliberative. This type of speaking occurs in public assemblies and gathering places. The orator speaks of events and circumstances to come in the future. The speaker demands a course of action and speaks of the good and the bad. Deliberate oratory is pragmatic and requires the orator to adjust his speech to current events and ideas. Aristotle indicated that some of the topics in deliberative oratory include: offspring, honor, strength, beauty, friendship, fortune, etc.

The second form of oratory is epideictic. This is a ceremonial oration which deals with the praising or blaming or existing conditions. This type of oratory deals with the present

and addresses itself to ethical and moral considerations. "He will...speak of virtue and vice, of the noble and disgraceful, since they constitute the aim of one who praises and of one who blames."⁸

The third form of oratory is forensic. Forensic oratory is used in the courtroom and can be either accusatory or defensive. Aristotle examines the motives of the criminal character as special *topoi*. According to Baldwin there are shortcomings to Aristotle's discussion of forensic, "his divisions of extrinsic proofs is for the modern lawyer neither scientific or significant."⁹

Book Two

Book Two of The Rhetoric deals with the audience. Aristotle felt that audiences would react positively to a speaker who possesses the qualities of wisdom, virtue, and goodwill. Aristotle viewed the audience as a study of human emotions and attitudes. Emotion is defined as "all those feelings that so change men as to affect their judgments, and that are also attended by pain or pleasure."¹⁰

Aristotle analyzed the emotions and their opposites with several applications to rhetorical discourse. He concludes with an example, "clearly the orator will have to speak so as to bring his hearers into a frame of mind that will dispose them to anger, and to represent his adversaries as open to such charges and possessed of such qualities as do make people angry."¹¹

Aristotle spent some time discussing common rhetorical arguments--example and enthymeme. Example is divided into fables and illustrative parallels. Aristotle advises that "if we can argue by enthymeme, we should use our examples as subsequent supplementary evidence. They should not precede the enthymemes; that will give the argument an inductive air which only rarely suits the conditions of speech-making."¹²

Aristotle divides enthymemes into two groups--demonstrative and refutative. "The demonstrative enthymeme draws conclusions from admitted premises, the refutative draws conclusions disputed by the adversary."¹³ Enthymemes are based on four types of fact: probabilities, examples, infallible signs, and fallible signs.

Book Three

Book Three of The Rhetoric is an examination of speech composition. This book is considered by some scholars as spurious. Aristotle analyzed delivery, but failed to recognize its importance, "rightly considered it is thought vulgar."¹⁴ He felt that delivery needed attention because of the sorry nature of audiences. Aristotle emphasizes the need for correct volume and rhythm in speech delivery.

After the discussion of delivery, Aristotle directs attention to the study of style. There are many virtues in style, principally clarity. Clarity is achieved by employing nouns and verbs as they are conventionally found. Ornamentation is the judicious use of metaphors. Aristotle discusses the vice of excessiveness. With reference to sentences and clauses,

Aristotle mentions the virtue of appropriateness, which is achieved through the expression of emotion and character. Appropriateness makes one's case appear more credible.

The form of diction is developed by Aristotle. He felt that rhythm is an important consideration. "The orator is warned to avoid meter lest his speech ring of poetry; and in equal measure, rhythm should avoid excess."¹⁵ Aristotle supports the use of paeon rhythm in persuasive speaking because of its non-metrical, yet rhythmical structure.

Aristotle also discusses the metaphor. He felt that metaphors give life and action to a speech. He also felt that metaphors should be obvious and deal with appropriate subjects. Distinctions are drawn between the various style forms. Aristotle felt that the style best suited for prose ill-suited for the rhetorician. He also pointed out that written speeches may fall short when spoken aloud. "Speeches suited for delivery, when delivery is absent, do not fulfill their proper function and appear silly."¹⁶

Aristotle discussed the four components of a speech-- introductions, proposition, proof, and epilogue. Aristotelian Theory has its limitations. The limitations become more apparent as contemporary society becomes more complex and varied. In order to meet the demands of a changing society, some Aristotelian Theories have been restructured. I close with one of Aristotle's favorite conclusions: "I have spoken; you have heard; you know the facts; now give your decision."¹⁷

ENDNOTES

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